

Name: Karen Greene

Title: Paraprofessional

Residence: Killingly

Organization or Agency: AFSCME Local 3689

Topic: HB 6881 - An Act Concerning Various Revisions to The Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, ranking members and members of the education committee: Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 6881, concerning paraprofessional compensation, training and working conditions.

My name is Karen Greene. This is my 19th year working as a paraprofessional in a kindergarten classroom at Killingly Central School. I'm a member of AFSCME Local 3689.

My current hourly pay is \$18.03 — 18 years doing this and I'm making \$18.03 an hour. That's a lot of years to say, that's all I make. I could not live on that wage. I am lucky that I have my husband who is the breadwinner in the family, so I'm not fighting for this bill here today because I need the money. Sadly, the most challenging aspect of being a paraeducator is that we are lacking enough people interested in doing this job due to the extremely low wages and disrespect from our district administrators.

We are spreading ourselves out thin trying to help so many. All of this affects the morale in our school. We are all overworked and underpaid. Many are getting burnt out or finding jobs elsewhere that pay more and give more respect. How can we be expected to support ourselves and our families on the extremely low wages and lousy health and retirement benefits? I know that if I didn't have my husband's retirement benefits, I would not be able to do this job.

If we keep losing more paraeducators, it's our children who will be losing more and more opportunities for learning. Legislators need to understand that Connecticut's paraeducators are the bones and support beams to building every child's education. Teachers teach, paras support — without us, many students struggle and possibly will drop out due to lack of support, socially and academically. Is this what we want for the children of our future? We're just coming out of a pandemic. I work with the youngest students, and I see that they need all the help they can get to break the habit of being in front of a screen all day and back into the routines that produce strong, independent, lifelong learners.

Please help House Bill 6881 to pass, so that more people find it economically possible and enticing to want to be a paraeducator and help the children of our future. These children need us! Let's not fail them.

Thank you,
Karen Greene